Through Summer Tidings

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Through Summer Tidings

by LunaStories

Summary

The heat of summer leaves Will hazy and disoriented, his mind boiling from the inside out. His relationship with Hannibal evolves and deepens, and with it, Will unwittingly grows closer to the truth and all that the Ripper has to offer.

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“I feel like I’m fading, but my fears linger. They feed on me, breaking me down and burning me to ash.”

“And what do your fears tell you?”

Notes

Hello! I wrote this in 3 days because I wanted to get it out before summer actually ended haha. Here is part 2 of the Seasons series. As this is a series, you may want to read part 1 before reading this one. I hope you guys will enjoy it!

Many thanks to the lovely Lin who has expressed excitement in reading this second fic inspired by their summer piece. Your support is very humbling <3 The art will be embed in the fic and linked at the end!

And of course, this fic is made better by my amazing beta Nicks who beta-ed this extremely fast when I came to them panicking about posting haha.

I would also like to give thanks to Dragon for being supportive and holding my hand when I cry about creating a summary and tags. (This panic happens every time I post and it always catches me by surprise)

Without further ado, please enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Heat.

That was the first thing Will noticed as he floated along the river, arms spread wide. He let the mild current take him where it pleased. Above him, dragonflies flitted about, hovering before darting past his body.

The sun beat down on him, burning the skin not submerged in the water. It cut like tiny pinpricks of hot needles. Slowly, he closed his eyes and let himself sink.

It was calm in the water. He kept sinking, past what would have been a reasonable depth for a river, and he knew he was dreaming. Still, this was the most peaceful dream he'd had in years, and perhaps it was that thought that summoned the Ravenstag.

He opened his eyes, and the large animal stared down at him from above the water. Its body nothing but a dark shadow with a head of antlers that stretched and grew as he watched. He blinked, and the image seemed to waver, distorted by the water until the Ravenstag took on a slightly more humanoid shape with antlers. It was monstrous looking, lanky and thin with empty, soulless eyes.

Distantly, the sun darkened before fading into nothing. The monster grinned, and through the shifting waters, all he could see were its sharp, white teeth. Will opened his mouth, unsure if he wanted to speak or scream, because in the next moment the clear water turned black, obscuring his view.

He panicked, flailing around as slick warmth flowed into his mouth, caressing his taste buds and slipping down his throat. He choked, eyes wide and unseeing as the tepid liquid slowly turned burning hot. The taste of metal and the thick consistency of the liquid told him what he already knew. He was submerged in a river of blood.

He tried to breathe, but it was suffocating. Oppressive heat surrounded him and kept him submerged. He screamed, and it echoed in his ears as he sat up in bed, chest heaving and body soaked with sweat.

For a moment, he wasn't sure if he was still dreaming. The darkness of the room reminded him too much of blood, and the humidity made it seem as if he was still drowning. Outside his window there was only the sound of crickets calling through the grass.

He brought a shaking hand to his face, trying in vain to wipe the scent of fear and wet-slick feel of blood from his skin. There was a sharp whine, and Will sighed, standing up and petting Winston's head. Winston must have sensed his agitation because he didn't leave Will's side, instead opting to follow him to the bathroom where he splashed some water on his face to try and clean up a bit.

He looked into a mirror, and for a second, his flushed face darkened into the same hue as the monster he'd seen. He blinked, and the moment was broken.

“Out, Winston,” Will pushed at the dog tiredly, turning to his shower and squinting at it. He still felt the dream clinging to him, sunk into his pores. Showering probably wouldn’t help, but it was better than nothing.

xxxxxx

“How are your dreams?”

Will let his head tip back, wine glass delicately balanced between his fingers as he curled up on Hannibal’s couch. He knew it was likely a bit rude to put his feet up on the leather couch, but he also knew that Hannibal allowed him certain liberties he wouldn’t accept from anyone else.

It was a heady feeling, this exclusivity.

“The same as always,” Will tipped the wine glass back, taking a large gulp of the whiskey he’d been given. It amused him, knowing that Hannibal chose to indulge him even when his nose had wrinkled in distaste at the sight of Will using his delicate wine glasses for hard whiskey. “Why do you ask?”

Hannibal studied him, sat primly in his leather seat with his own wine glass held between graceful fingers. Hannibal’s was filled with a red-purple liquid, and for a second it reminded Will of blood and the taste of it on his tongue. The fire crackled, and their eyes both darted to the fireplace before they relaxed, soaking in the light heat emanating from the fire and filling the study room Hannibal had settled them in.

It was perhaps too hot for a cozy fire, after all, they were in the midst of summer. But it was a comforting sight, the smell accompanied with memories of sticky fingers and toasted marshmallows. Hannibal’s place was fancy, Will was well aware of that, and it allowed them the luxury of ignoring the changing seasons. The air-conditioner was working overtime, trying to keep the house cool even as the oppressive heat outside surrounded them and the fire inside only encouraged the festering heat.

“You seemed tired. I was merely concerned on the state of your health.”

Will scoffed, the warm memories broken as his fingers tightening on the wine glass and his glare settling somewhere on Hannibal’s shoulder. “I’m fine, Hannibal.”

“You don’t need to lie to me, Will.”

Will bared his teeth, clinking the glass against them as he drank the rest of the whiskey in several long gulps. It burned going down, and he knew he still had to drive home later but he felt off-kilter. Like the heat was burning his skin off and leaving him bare.

“Sometimes, people lie for good reason.”

“None of those reasons bear any weight here,” Hannibal replied, gentle as his fingers brushed over Will’s. Will relinquished his hold on the glass, sighing as Hannibal set it on a side table for him. “I will have you laid bare, or not at all.”

“Didn’t know you called the shots here, Doctor Lecter,” Will tapped his fingers on his thighs now that they were free to do so. He noticed Hannibal’s gaze dart down to his fingers, a slight furrow in his brow before his expression smoothed out into something more gentle and placid. For a second there, it was almost as if Hannibal was someone else.

Someone that showed distaste and a violent darkness.

That notion was obviously unbelievable. After all, Hannibal may be a bit of a sadist, taking joy in poking and prodding at Will’s weak spots, but therapists in general all shared the same proclivities. Or at least, the ones he’d had the misfortune of knowing.

Still, something in him trembled for a second. His body doused cold with sudden awareness, his throat clicking as he swallowed. His hands shook, minutely, before stilling.

“I don’t,” Hannibal answered, back to his placid visage as he leaned back and sipped at his own wine. “It is always your choice how much you wish to reveal to me, but I must admit there is a certain appeal to seeing you share something you would otherwise keep secret from others.”

Will’s eyes drifted over Hannibal, taking in his relaxed but regal stance that hid the slightest bit of eager tension. It showed in the way Hannibal couldn’t help but lean forward, as if he was drawn to Will. It showed in his grip on the wine glass, tighter than he would usually allow, if he was truly relaxed and at ease.

Will saw enough, and what he saw both surprised and pleased him.

“You want all of me,” Will breathed out, unable to stop himself from putting his revelation into words. He couldn’t tell if he was flushed because of the whiskey, the fire, or because of what Hannibal seemed to feel for him. “But especially the parts I hide even from myself.”

Hannibal stiffened, fingers clenching and unclenching on the wine glass before setting it down on the end table with a soft clink. “Is it so wrong of me to desire a glimpse into your mind? It is elusive in its complexity, and often held to a higher standard than others. To unravel it is to know all of you.”

“That’s what a lot of therapists want from me,” Will pointed out, standing up and pacing over until he was in front of the fire. He stared at it, feeling the prickling heat on his eyes and the hot regard of Hannibal’s gaze on his back. “You want that too, but that isn’t all of it.”

There was silence, so quiet that the only sound seemed to come from the crackling of dying wood, burnt to ash. Will felt intoxicated, more from this conversation than the alcohol he’d consumed, and it left him feeling powerful. Bolder than he usually would be, and a bit brazen.

He turned and met Hannibal’s eyes. Hannibal was truly a sight to behold. His gaze was dark with hunger, his mouth sightly open as he flicked his tongue out to wet his lips. Firelight danced over his features, throwing them into severe angles, and for a moment, the shadows seemed to stretch behind Hannibal. The shadow towered over them. It bent over with a quiet hiss, lanky arms and sharp claws dragging Will closer as its antlers grew, and grew.

Almost without conscious thought, he stepped forward, dragged closer by the monster. Finally, he stopped until he too was towering over Hannibal, both of them cast in shadow. Hannibal kept still, his breathing slow and even, but Will could tell it was an act. Just like he could see that Hannibal was struggling against the desire to spread his legs and let Will slide between them.

A part of him was grateful for Hannibal's restraint. He wasn't sure if he was ready for more of whatever this was between them. But a part of him was too filled with heat to feel any sort of trepidation. It consumed him, until all he wanted was to press his mouth to heated skin and consume back, to burn his mark into Hannibal.

"You don't want me to share any part of myself. Not unless it's with you," Will leaned in, hands settling on the back of the leather chair as he sighed, his lips brushing gently over Hannibal's cheekbones. He felt Hannibal shudder, and heard the distinct creak of strained leather. A glance down showed him Hannibal's tight grip had transferred over to the arms of the chair. It made him grin, teeth sharp and victorious. "You don't want my mind, you want *me*."

Hannibal's sharp inhale was all he needed to hear, and he leaned in for the kill, eyes half-lidded and dazed as his lips brushed the corner of Hannibal's in a tremble of need. Before he could turn his head and properly kiss Hannibal, he was stopped by a hand on his throat. The grip tightened, enough for him to choke momentarily, before it abruptly softened.

"You're drunk," Hannibal rasped, pulling his head back and putting some distance between them. His hand was still on Will's throat, unable to resist caressing the straining tendon there, held in stasis after being denied what it wanted. "I'll lend you the guest room. You shouldn't drive back in this state."

Will blinked, and the shadows receded. He let out a shaky breath and a bitter laugh as he leaned back. He ran a hand down his mouth, only noticing now how strong the scent of whiskey was on his mouth. His skin burned, and this time it was unpleasant, a consuming sense of embarrassment as he followed after Hannibal silently.

Hannibal left him in the guest room, politely and cordially showing him the attached bathroom before bidding him good night. Will kept his eyes on the floor the whole time, too mortified by his actions. He'd managed to mumble back a quick good night, because even at his lowest point he wouldn't think to be rude to Hannibal. Not when the man found it so abhorrent.

Will stumbled over to the bed and let himself flop onto it with a groan. He risked a quick sniff of himself and felt his nose crinkle up in distaste. No wonder Hannibal had rejected him, he'd drank so much he practically smelled like a bar.

He flung an arm across his eyes, trying to ignore the prickle of tears. It hadn't meant anything anyways. That brief connection Will had felt, as if he'd unearthed a rare gem, a part of Hannibal that others would never see. It'd left him breathless with want, the realization that it was the real Hannibal he'd seen flickering on the edges of Hannibal's person suit, like dying embers on a charred log.

But just because he liked what he saw, didn't mean Hannibal would like all of Will. They were still learning each other, in this hesitant dance of their's. He could only hope he hadn't fucked it up.

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He woke up the next morning with a pounding headache and a shrill ringing. He let out a pained groan as he shoved his hand into his pants pocket and extracted his screaming phone with clumsy fingers.

He didn't bother looking at the caller ID before flicking it open. There was only one person who'd be rude enough to call at such an ungodly hour.

"Will, where are you?" Jack's barked, a certain tension in his voice. Jack was always uncomfortably loud and firm, but with his hangover giving him hell, it made the sound even more irritable than usual.

"Sleeping. Like any normal person would be."

Jack scoffed, and Will felt he should be offended by that but he was too busy getting up and slowly making his way to his shoes where he'd toed them off before falling asleep. "Please, we both know you don't keep normal hours."

"That's because of the nightmares, Jack," Will corrected with false patience, roughly shoving his feet into his shoes with a grunt. "The nightmares that follow whenever you call me to a crime scene."

"Just go see Doctor Lecter after this," Jack replied just as dismissively as Will had expected. "We need you here now."

"I know."

They always needed him. God, he was just so fucking tired. Sometimes, he wondered how different he would be without the ghosts of killers dancing around in his head.

"It's the Ripper."

Those words were enough to wake him up, and Will cursed before scrambling to the bathroom and putting Jack on speaker phone. He hurried through his usual morning routine, washing himself as much as he could with a cloth. Most of the agents already saw him as an unhinged nutcase that Jack indulged, he didn't need to show up smelling like one as well.

"Where is it this time?"

There was a long silence and it made Will feel a prickle of nerve, a pause in his routine as he swallowed hard.

"Where is it, Jack?" Will whispered.

"The river near your house."

“I’ll be there soon,” Will bit out before hanging up. He braced himself on the sink, dizzy with a cacophony of emotions. Will wished he could say that the killers he hunted never targeted him. That would be a blatant lie, because it had already happened one too many times. But the Ripper…

Will shivered, and he was self-aware enough to know it wasn’t from fear, but elation.

Perhaps for prey, to be the target of a predator was both daunting and horrific. But Will had never been prey, no matter how hard he tried to pretend.

No, his game with the Ripper had always been one killer regarding another, and it seemed this time the Ripper wanted to play on Will’s terms.

Will grabbed his stuff in a hurry and opened his door only to almost crash into Hannibal. Hannibal had a fist raised, as if he’d been about to knock on the door. He was already fully dressed in a suit, not a hair out of place.

“Sorry,” Will mumbled, the previous night rushing back to him as he flushed. “I’ve overstayed my welcome. I was just heading out.”

Hannibal did not move, and it forced Will to look up, just enough to settle his eyes on the man’s nose.

“Are you in a rush? I wanted us to eat breakfast together before we went our separate ways.”

Hannibal’s offer was tempting, but Will didn’t know if he had the stomach to sit through an awkward meal with the man who’d rejected him. For once, he was glad that Jack had called him to a crime scene at such an early hour.

“I have to go check out a crime scene, Jack called,” Will shrugged, an apologetic grimace on his lips as he side-stepped Hannibal and slid out into the hallway. “Maybe next time.”

“Is it for the Ripper case?”

Will turned reluctantly, fingers twitching with the desire to escape. “Yes.”

“We can take my car then,” Hannibal smiled, and this time it was all teeth. As if he’d sunk his jaws into the neck of his prey and didn’t plan on letting go anytime soon. “I was called in as well, to determine the time of death.”

Will felt his heart sink, but he managed to hide his discomfort with a thin-lipped nod. He could feel teeth digging into his neck, tightening in triumph.

“Sounds good.”

xxxxxx

The woods around his house had always been a safe haven to him. Growing up with just his dad, they travelled frequently, drifting from town to coastal town on their small boat. It wasn’t the most glamorous life, but Will had been happy.

After his father's death, he'd been forced to settle down. Grow roots in a place that meant little to him, until he learned to love it like a home. When he'd bought his isolated house, he'd decided on it because of its proximity to the woods and the river within.

It gave him a sense of peace, walking through the tall grass as the birds called out their song around him. The trees were dense enough for him to feel alone but alive, the forest a constant pulse of life. When he breathed in, the smell of trampled grass and wet mud would overtake his senses.

Fishing was the only time he felt his mind quiet, the water a sort of safe haven for him. It allowed his thoughts to flow, adrift in the currents, the only place where his darkness couldn't touch him. He would wait patiently, waist deep in the cool waters as the air around him stifled him with its heat. The dichotomy of half-chill and summer warmth always left him shivering in pleasure, a smile tugging on his lips as he named his bait and cast his fishing line.

Now, standing before a bloated body and the putrid stench unfiltered through the humidity of the air, he wondered if he could ever be in the water again without bringing his corpses with him.

"Alana was the one that found the body."

Jack stood to his right, voice solemn as he glanced over at the FBI van where Alana was sitting wrapped in a shock blanket. Hannibal had taken a look at the body and declared it dead before going over to comfort Alana.

"Why was she even here?" Will's words were a quiet whisper, choked out of him as he tried to breath through the thickness in the air. The dragonflies were absent, as if even they knew something was wrong. The forest was loud with voices and human sounds, out of place in this isolated spot of nature.

The worst part was that Will already knew why she'd been here. There wasn't another house for miles around him. She'd come for him this morning, likely to visit and check up on him. When she'd found him missing, she'd deduced he was likely out fishing and had headed to his river only to stumble across more than what she bargained for.

It was his fault.

No. A voice seemed to speak in his head, low and with a vicious growl. *This was the Ripper's fault.*

God, any earlier and there was a possibility Alana would have been the victim. Wrong place, wrong time. She'd come so close to death today.

"Will," Jack's voice cut though his self-loathing, and Will blinked before taking off his glasses with a shaky sigh. He knew what Jack wanted. "Tell me what you see."

Will closed his eyes and let the pendulum swing.

The night was beautiful, and despite the late hour, it was still humid enough for his suit to stick uncomfortably close to his skin. The animals were louder than usual, as if aware a predator was in their midst and started calling out warnings to their brethren. The cicadas chirped in rhythmic patterns, and the hoot of an owl nearby only added to the darkness. What little wind there was didn't dampen the burning inferno in his chest, his actions guided by fascination and need.

He carefully laid the body in his arms into the river, weighing her down with some rocks and ropes around the waist. It wouldn't do to have her drift off, not when this was the exact place he needed her to be.

Her pitch black hair spread out in waves around her pale face. When they dipped into the water, they floated idly through each tiny ripple like ink. She had distinguished features, blue eyes and petal soft lips. There were rope bruises around her neck, the only evidence of the violence she'd endured before she'd succumbed to the strangulation. She could have been a beauty, untarnished and pure, if she hadn't been so unbearably rude.

She served a greater purpose now.

Carefully, he positioned her hands until they rested against her chest. With precision, he placed flowers within her grasp, bending her stiff with rigor-mortis fingers until they settled in a tight enough grip that the flowers wouldn't float away.

He stepped back, critiquing the scene with the eye of an artist. Above them, the moonlight cut through the darkness of the forest, leaving the waters glittering and gleaming. Her skin seemed to glow, more beautiful in death than in life. The flowers were bright spots of color against the pure white dress he'd placed her in, not a spot of blood on it. The dress drifted in the water, creating a hazy film, almost like fog.

Still, there was something missing.

With a delighted hum, he plucked a few daisies from the surrounding brush and scattered them into the water. They were bright pinpoints of light against the still waters, and gave her an almost ethereal look.

He breathed in the warm air and let it fill his chest to bursting, his mind firing at rapid pace with all the intensity of a man who'd always taken what he wanted. The sight of her still body in the moonlight brought him joy, the presentation representing only a fraction of what he felt for his darling, his love.

She was beautiful and perfect, just like *him*.

Will opened his eyes with a gasp, stumbling backwards and straight into someone's arms. He stared, eyes wide as the monster from before appeared crouched over the victim's body. Its eyes were blank, but with gentle claws, it brushed its fingers against her cheek. The gesture was full of something tender, and it made Will ache and his teeth itch with the urge to bite down. It made him hunger.

This was a ravenous monster, full of insatiable need, and it wanted something really badly. Bad enough that it's modus operandi has been slightly altered. The Ripper's crime scenes had never held such passion before, and never for a singular person.

This was the work of an enamored predator.

"-ill? Will," The steady voice pulled him out of his daze, an anchor for his drifting mind, and he came back to himself with a violent shudder. He felt hot, and he was panting like he'd run a mile. Strong arms surrounded him, and he clutched at them with sweaty palms and a tinge of desperation. Hannibal's familiar scent soothed him, softening the tang of death in the air.

Will waited for his trembling to stop, until he felt stable enough to leave Hannibal's comforting hold. After what seemed like an eternity, he stepped forward, already missing the steady feeling of Hannibal's chest against his back. He could still feel the heat of him, close and consuming, but he couldn't let it distract him.

"Will."

This time, it was Jack who called his name rather impatiently, though the corners of his eyes were tight with something like guilt. Witnessing Will almost having a panic attack could do that, though it didn't mean it would stop Jack.

"Jack."

The quiet rumble of Hannibal's voice seemed out of place for a moment, and it wasn't until Will glanced back at the man that he realized it was because there was a note of reprimand in his voice.

"Let him breathe."

"Coddling him won't help," Jack argued, obviously deciding that Will was well enough to step back into the scene and assist.

"You asked me to take care of him. That choice is no longer in your hands, and right now he needs time to recover."

Will could feel the tension in the air, bristling and cutting through the thick heat of it, and he was stuck in the middle. He didn't want it to escalate, he was already so fucking tired.

"It's fine, Hannibal," Will spoke up, weary and rough. His hand came up to scrub at his aching skin, to scratch at his stubble. He didn't want Jack to get another word in, especially when he looked like he'd been gearing up for an argument. "I just want to get this over with."

Hannibal didn't say anything but there was a soft brush of a hand against his lower back, a gesture of support that warmed Will. Hannibal was trusting him to know what he was doing, and to be aware of his own limitations. He could only hope he wouldn't disappoint.

"Come on," Jack tilted his head towards the body, words soft now that he'd gotten what he wanted. "Tell me what you saw."

Will stepped back towards the body. He didn't realize he'd backpedaled so far away, though part of it might have been Hannibal dragging him away from the scene while he'd been panicking. Hannibal's protectiveness was still a novelty to Will, especially since he'd realized it wasn't something Hannibal showed often and rarely towards any specific person.

Will focused his mind back onto the case, willing himself to stop thinking of Hannibal. He decided to humor Jack instead, even as he felt Hannibal follow closely behind him, his curious gaze burning holes into the back of his head.

"What kind of flowers do you see here?"

The question was more rhetorical than serious, but he was thoroughly surprised when Jack answered him.

"The flowers in her hands are purple pansies and red poppies. The smaller ones scattered around her in the water are white daisies."

When Jack noticed Will's surprised look, he let his lips pull up into a small smile. "Bella always liked flowers. I've learned to identify them over the years."

Will nodded in approval. It was always interesting to see Jack speak about his wife, he was almost gentle when he did. A tamed beast.

Perhaps, that was what the Ripper would become, once he'd caught his prey. The thought almost made him laugh. As if the Ripper could ever be tamed.

"The Ripper has used flowers for his sounders before, and usually he picks them based on their meaning," Will continued, eyes distant as he went through his own knowledge on flowers. With the amount of serial killers that used flowers as a part of their design, it had become more of a necessity than he'd anticipated. "Purple pansies often symbolize beauty and nobility. It is the sort of flower you buy if you want to express your admiration for someone special to you. The Ripper thinks this person is unique and wants to cultivate that."

"He thinks the victim was special?" Jack furrowed his brows, lips twisting down into a frown. "Killing her seems a bizarre way of showing his admiration."

Will shook his head. "The Ripper doesn't think like you and me. Killing her is another way for her to become something more. To elevate her to a greater purpose. But no, his regard is not for the victim, but rather for someone else. The daisies often show new beginnings and purity but the poppies symbolize peace and death."

"That's…an interesting combination," Jack conceded, hands coming up to rub at his mouth, deep in thought. "What could it mean?"

"This is a caricature of Sir John Everett Millais' Ophelia," Hannibal's voice was a quiet murmur, almost startling Will. "Her story is a tragedy."

"She was trapped between obligation and desire," Will continued Hannibal's train of thought, mind dizzy with the realization. There was a sinking feeling in his chest, and the scent of

blood on his tongue. “She couldn’t bear to choose between those two, because to choose one would be to betray the other. So in the end, her love was what drove her to suicide. It was the only way for her to stay true to her morals and keep her love pure. She found peace in death.”

Will turned and accidentally met Hannibal’s eyes, the fascination in them too intense for him to bear. He quickly looked down, letting out a controlled breath as he watched the water slowly turn red with blood. He traced the water ripples until they ended at the feet of the body. When he looked up the floating body, he realized he was staring into his own face, eyes dead and distant, fingers delicately curled around the stems of the flowers.

The body suddenly jolted and moved, slowly rising above the water on a head of antlers, a sacrificial altar.

Will watched, and he saw.

“The Ripper has found his muse,” He whispered, shuddering as the antlers held the image of his body, almost like the stems of a bouquet of flowers, with his corpse as the beautiful blossoms. “And it has opened up new ways of thinking for him. There is joy written in every detail he placed on her. This kill is one of celebration. He has finally found someone who can understand him. He values this person because of it, but at the same time, he doesn’t think their story will end well.”

“His muse will eventually need to die, because the Ripper’s love is all-consuming. In the Ripper’s eyes, his death won’t be a tragedy, but a mercy. His muse won’t have to choose,” Will sucked in a deep breath, the sharp prickle of some unnamed emotion against his eyes that made him want to close them and never open them again. “He will give his muse the peace he deserves. Through death, he can finally be free.”

Distantly, he heard Jack scoff, his words burning a trail of fire in his mind.

“Courted by the angel of death? I pity whoever it is.”

Will blinked, and suddenly the waters were still again, the woman’s body floating idly in its wake.

“Yes,” Will swallowed, mouth dry and breath hot. “I do too.”

He ignored the burning in his gut, the desire and the want that he felt. He ignored the awe he had at what was now obviously a courting gift of sorts, a macabre show of devotion, a promise that the Ripper would never let his muse end up like Ophelia. Suicide was the enemy, and it was better for his muse to die by his hands than any other.

He shuddered, and he wondered if it was from fear, revulsion, or anticipation.

xxxxxx

“Sorry I’m late,” Will pulled out the chair at the coffee shop they’d decided on and shot a wan smile at Alana. She was dressed for the weather in a light yellow sundress that accentuated her curves. There was a cute straw hat on the table, likely her protection from the sun’s piercing rays.

Alana raised a brow at him before taking a sip from her artistically rendered cup of coffee, the amused twist of her lips hidden behind the mug. He hadn’t been the one to choose this place as their meeting spot, it was too hipster for him. They served their coffee in actual mugs.

It was the kind of pretentious place Hannibal would like.

He pushed that thought out of his mind immediately. He’d been trying very hard not to think about Hannibal. After inspecting the Ripper scene two weeks ago, he’d ignored all of Hannibal’s calls. They went from eating dinner almost three times a week together to no contact at all.

He didn’t realize how much he’d miss the man, but there were some things he needed to figure out for himself first, before he could approach Hannibal again. The man made him feel too much, and Will needed some distance after the rejection.

It was clear that Will’s clumsy attempt at a kiss would have tipped Hannibal off to the feelings Will had for him. And Hannibal’s reaction had spelled out to him that he didn’t feel the same way. It still made his face pull into a grimace of pain whenever he remembered how he’d acted like an animal in heat, face flushed with whiskey and looming over Hannibal. It

had been stupid of him to hope, he'd read the signs wrong and made Hannibal exceedingly uncomfortable. His mind didn't feel fully clear these days. He blamed it on the unbearable heat.

"Is something wrong?"

Alana's soft voice pulled him out of his daze, and he realized he'd been sitting there staring listlessly. He probably looked like he was crazy. He hadn't even ordered a drink.

With a sigh, he gestured to the line before heading over and ordering something quick. A black coffee would hopefully wake him up a bit more. He found that recently, he couldn't keep a train of thought for long, mind unfocused and hazy.

When he returned with his mug, he sat down with a quiet grunt, his eyes taking in Alana's impeccable form, not a hair out of place.

"I should be asking you that."

Her smile dropped a little, soft and distant. "I'll learn to live with it, Will. I can walk away from the scene, but you can't. I'm not the one that has to deal with the monsters in my head."

"Maybe," Will conceded as he took a sip of the hot coffee, he winced when it burned his mouth. He really should have ordered something cold, especially in this summer heat. Already he could feel his shirt sticking to his back. "But you came close to one that day."

He let the silence linger, but Alana could tell he wanted to say something more. Finally, her patience won out and Will let the words slip with some reluctance. "I think we should stop meeting each other."

Her gaze sharpened, long nails clicking in alarm against the mug, and Will should've known she'd try to fight this. "Why? Is something wrong?"

Will pressed his lips together, unsure how to explain the feeling of foreboding he had, the pressing weight of it that followed him no matter how far he tried to run. In his mind, he was trapped in that river, the place no longer a haven but rather the perfect resting place for his eventual death. It angered him to know that the Ripper had so thoroughly corrupted his sense of peace, but at the same time…

The river had been his safe place, that was true. But it had never been *him*. The calm waters and quiet forest didn't reflect who he was. This second sounder in the midst of his territory had shaken him to his core, but the death and chaos that followed it didn't scare him.

It made him feel less alone.

And what did that say about him?

"I think that the Ripper knows about me."

Alana gasped, her eyes wide with worry before she reached a hand out to cover his, her fingers gripping his tightly. "Have you told Jack?"

Will shook his head. “If I did he would put me on house arrest and station someone to watch me at all times. I can’t live like that, Alana.”

She scrutinized him, face scrunched up and mouth twisted into an unhappy frown. Her words were slow and careful. “I know you won’t like it, but isn’t it preferable to death? Will, if he knows about you, he might go after you.”

Will didn’t want to say that he already has. That he’d brazenly interrupted Will’s peace and marked it with blood and dark intentions. He didn’t want to admit that a tiny part of him liked that.

Gently, he took her hand off of his. He stared at the point of connection between them, the one spot of light in his otherwise bloody world.

“This is my job, Alana.”

“Your *job* isn’t to face killers on your own,” Her voice was harsher now, rough and tense with pain, a tinge of desperation. She always did try to save him from himself, his self-destructive tendencies something she’d always scrutinized with a heavy heart. “It’s bad enough that they’re in your head, but Jack promised me he wouldn’t let you get too close.”

Will smiled, a fleeting thing that was more sardonic than genuine. “When has Jack ever kept one of his promises?”

Her silence was answer enough.

They parted ways not soon after, and Will managed to wrangle a promise from her that she’d stay away until the case was over. They both knew it could be an indeterminate amount of time, especially since this was the elusive Ripper, but Will was truly concerned that the Ripper would go after her. He couldn’t risk that happening.

And now, he was alone again.

xxxxxx

It was a Wendigo.

Will knew that now. With the taste of offal on his tongue and the warmth of blood down his throat, he understood what the Ripper had done with the organs. They weren’t trophies, no, they were *meat*.

It was meant to humiliate, the oldest act of dominance. To consume your opponent, though Will was sure that the Ripper didn’t see any of his victims as worthy. An opponent implied that they were equals.

All of the people he killed were nothing more than livestock.

In the liminal space of his dreams, this realization came and went, and Will hoped it would stay with him in his waking hours because right now, he was following the monster.

It walked with the woman in its arms, slow and steady with a strength that seemed far too great for a creature so slight. He followed it, silent as a mouse even though he was aware the creature knew that Will was close behind.

The forest was filled with sounds and smells, this time with the true purity of uninhabited nature. There was a scream that echoed suddenly, and Will knew it was the cry of a fox but it sounded eerily human in the shifting night they were cloaked in. The ground was covered in leaves wet from the dew. They squished under his feet, and mosquitos buzzed around his face.

The Wendigo finally stopped at the river and turned to look at Will. Will stood at the edge of the trees, watching as it slowly backed away until it was in the center of the river. It placed the woman into the water, her limbs sprawled gracefully and face slack as if she was asleep.

Will stepped closer, drawn by the sight of the Wendigo's dark skin against her pale white dress. It moved until it was more submerged in the water, almost to its waist. The Wendigo was no longer paying attention to him, instead placing the tips of its claws against the woman's chest and positioning it over her heart.

Will held his breath, because he knew what the Wendigo wanted. A drop of sweat slid down the back of his neck, and his breathing was heavy in the thick, heated air. It hurt to breath in, as if he'd swallowed something and could never get it back out.

His eyes traced the woman's pale features and he sighed, a bit of frustration building in him. "Who are you a gift for?" The question lingered in the night air, but Will knew there would be no answer.

He watched as the Wendigo ripped out her heart, claws somehow steady and precise. Almost surgical. Though its expression didn't change, there was an air of satisfaction around it. Will's feet led him closer to the monster, as if it couldn't help itself.

Finally, he leaned over, towering over the Wendigo and careful to avoid its sharp antlers. Slowly, as if afraid to spook him, the Wendigo proudly held up the heart, the blood dripping black in the moonlight and staining the woman's dress. Though even that was soon washed away by the river's waters.

Later on, he would try to make excuses for why he did it. Maybe it was the breathless look of anticipation on the Wendigo's face. Maybe he was too afraid to reject it.

But in that moment, all he felt was awe and acceptance.

He leaned in and bit into the heart. White flowers spilled out, tainted with blood and lending a bittersweet taste to the raw meat.

There were tears on his cheeks, and when he opened his eyes, he was met with the sharp, satisfied grin of the Wendigo.

He breathed in the thick scent of blood, tasted the metallic flavor of it, and felt whole.

xxxxxx

When Will woke up gasping and drenched in sweat, body achingly hot and aflame, he scrambled for his phone. Instead of calling Jack like he'd intended, his fingers moved on their own.

The flowers had been white chrysanthemums.

He stared at the webpage, a shiver of dread crawling down his spine.

White chrysanthemum. Truth, and loyal love.

He wondered then, what truth he was supposed to see, and who exactly he was supposed to give his loyal love to.

Hannibal's face flashed in his mind, with a dark shadow behind him that Will knew was the Ripper. In his mind's eye they were one and the same, but he was too fevered to remember why that was as he succumbed to exhaustion and the haze of sleep.

xxxxxx

"Will."

The voice broke him out of his daze, and Will blinked before focusing on the man in front of him. He didn't remember how he got here. There was a thought on the back of his mind, like maybe he was supposed to talk to someone about something. An important revelation wrapped in spices and aesthetics.

Hannibal stood, a tentative smile on his lips as he opened the door to his house, standing to the side in a clear gesture of invitation.

"Please, come in."

Will took in a deep shuddering breath, barely audible over the sound of chirping insects and the heavy rustle of wind through the bushes. A bead of sweat ran down his neck and settled on his plaid button up. The heat was cloying, sticking to him in a way that made him feel like he was still dreaming. The sun seemed to pierce through his clothing, disregarding his protective layers and feasting on his skin.

He stepped into the house without another word. It was much cooler within Hannibal's house, and he took a moment to enjoy the air-conditioned interior against his flushed skin.

"Would you like to take off your outerwear?" Will turned, biting at his bottom lip as he stepped backwards into the house and away from Hannibal's outstretched hand. It was clearly meant to be a polite gesture, something he would do for any guest who came in.

He clutched his plaid shirt tighter against himself, hands fisted in it as his eyes darted around warily. He felt safer wrapped up, like it was a layer of armor. It wouldn't hide his feelings from Hannibal's prying eyes, but he could pretend.

Will shook his head, and Hannibal's lips pressed into a thin line, a measure of dark concern over his face before he plastered a kind smile on. He led Will into the kitchen and started pulling out things, clearly intent on feeding Will before he left. Will stood awkwardly on the other side of the granite counter, his arms crossed as his eyes darted from Hannibal's fridge to his knives.

"What are you making?" Will let his lips pull into a strained smile, even if Hannibal didn't turn to see his efforts, intent on preparing the meat he'd pulled out of the fridge.

"Foie gras. This one was a rather tame water fowl," His voice seemed amused as he shot a glance at Will over his shoulder. "I'm certain you will enjoy it."

Will nodded, not denying the words. He hadn't had a single dish cooked by Hannibal's hands that he hadn't loved.

There was a long peaceful silence, and Will had just started to relax when Hannibal spoke up, tone gentle and deceptively casual. "What brings you to my home at such an odd hour? You missed the last few sessions we had planned, so I hope it won't offend you to say I wasn't expecting you."

Will stepped on one foot then the other, shifting in place before clearing his throat. He could feel a shadow stalking outside of the kitchen windows, cast down by the sun's rays. He didn't know the answer to Hannibal's question, and that should worry him, but his mouth blurted out the words without his input. "I wanted to apologize for how I acted."

Hannibal turned to face him then, wiping his hands on a towel before raising a brow in surprise. "I wasn't aware you had anything to apologize for."

"I was rude, and even if I called to let you know I'd be missing the sessions, it still wasn't nice of me to avoid you." He tried to articulate why he was here but his mind flitted from thought to thought, barely holding on. He leaned a hand against the counter top and tried to focus. His fingers trembled.

Hannibal nodded, seemingly acquiescing the fact that Will had acted in a less than savory manner. "Apology accepted. I had thought it was likely the new case that unsettled you, and that you needed time alone to digest. Taking some time to yourself isn't a crime, Will."

"I know, but we both know it wasn't the case that led to my avoidance."

When Hannibal gave him a look filled with curiosity, Will sighed, knowing he'd have to spell it out. "I came onto you while I was drunk, and I shouldn't have. I know my unwanted advances must have been uncomfortable for you."

Hannibal's expression went through several emotions, so fast that even Will's empathy had to struggle to catch up. He caught what looked like fascination, longing, surprise and finally settled on a harsh sort of possessiveness. The emotions he saw had him reeling back as if he'd been whipped, and Will blinked a few times to try and process the information he was getting. This was the most expressive he'd ever seen Hannibal and it left him feeling unsettled.

“Was it?”

“Was it what?” Will asked, a little dazed as he breathed through the waves of heat washing over him. Maybe he could have just avoided Hannibal forever, but he hadn’t wanted his feelings to get in the way of the best friendship that he’s ever had. No one understood him and accepted him, darkness and all, like Hannibal did. He didn’t know what he would do if he lost Hannibal. He could feel himself get more and more jittery, his breath coming out in short bursts.

“Was it truly unwanted? Or did you place your insecurities on my words and actions and drew your own conclusions?”

Will stopped breathing for a long moment, eyes wild and suddenly flooding with hope. “What do you mean…?”

Hannibal let out a quiet chuckle, the sound warming Will from the inside out. It was the most honest sound he’d ever heard from the man. “Perhaps your feelings are not as unwelcome as you seem to believe. Maybe they are reciprocated and we both had different views of that night.”

“What was your version of events?” Will asked, breathless in anticipation and cheeks warm.

There was a wry smile on Hannibal’s lips as he shut off the fire on the food, deeming it finished. He walked around the countertop, movements slow and careful as if he didn’t want to spook Will. Finally, he stood in front of Will. He lifted a hand up, and Will held his breath as Hannibal cupped his face in one large palm. His thumb stroked across Will’s stubble, and Will let out a shaky exhale, his own hand coming up to settle on Hannibal’s waist.

“That was one of the most pleasant nights I’d had,” Hannibal spoke, whisper soft and filled with fondness. Will couldn’t help but meet his eyes and drown in the affection there. “If it wasn’t for the alcohol in your veins, I would have taken you right then and there.”

The words affected Will in a way that he hadn’t anticipated. A shiver of want went down his spine, and in the next moment he was pressing his lips desperately against Hannibal’s. There was a sharp indrawn breath of surprise from Hannibal before he pressed back, gentling the biting kiss into something more soft and sensual. He kissed Will like he was something precious, a hand coming up to card through Will’s hair. Will let out a soft sigh of happiness as he savored the distinct curve of Hannibal’s lips. He melted against Hannibal, arms wrapping around Hannibal as they separated for air.

He laid his head on Hannibal’s shoulder with another sigh, this time much more subdued, his thoughts leaving him no reprieve. “This isn’t just something fleeting for me.” He needed to let Hannibal know, because if this was just another brief romantic entanglement for him, then he wasn’t sure he’d be able to survive it.

Hannibal pressed a kiss to his curls, his strong arms coming around Will and mirroring him in a firm hug. “Then I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

The words had Will relaxing against Hannibal with a relieved breath, the rush of adrenaline and pleasure burning a path up his spine and to the base of his neck. The heat increased steadily until he had to step back and rest the palm of his hand against the back of his head, his eyes pressed tightly shut and a grimace of pain on his face.

When he opened his eyes, there seemed to be two Hannibal's, one in front of him wearing a concerned look, and the other was at the kitchen sink next to the cutting board. That one was washing something, back turned to them.

"There's something else as well," Will said, faintly, watching the play of muscles on the other Hannibal's back, his white dress shirt straining against his motions. Will couldn't hear his own voice, but the words floated in the air above him, forming flowers that brought bright spots of color in the otherwise monochrome kitchen. Purple, red and white. "A thought that's been haunting me," That thought was the real reason why he was here, Will could feel it on the tip of his tongue, as if it was a scream caught in his throat.

Hannibal tilted his head, a distinctly reptilian gesture before he walked towards the cutting board with a relaxed air about him. His Hannibal melded with the other one, and in their place stood the Wendigo. "Is there something bothering you, Will?" The Wendigo's long claws settled on the handle of the blade, idly lifting it. There was nothing else for it to cut.

Will took a deep breath before shaking his head, trying to get rid of the nightmarish sight before him. He dizzily scowled as the Wendigo's dark skin slowly retreated until Hannibal's familiar back was facing him. His eyes darted down to the counter top for a second, trying to reorient himself when a loud cracking sound broke the tense silence.

He flinched, and watched with wide, horrified eyes as Hannibal's spine split open in the middle, pulled to the left and right by dark antlers. White chrysanthemum spilled out of the cavity and onto the floor, following the river of blood that seemed to stream continuously out of Hannibal's back. It rose, and rose, until they were submerged in blood, the countertop no longer visible. It stopped at waist height, but the blood moved like it was alive. Will choked out the words, blood climbing up his body and flowing down his throat. "I feel like I'm fading, but my fears linger. They feed on me, breaking me down and burning me to ash."

"And what do your fears tell you?"

A shiver of alarm went down Will's back at the darkness in those words, the hint of ravenous anticipation obvious even in his fevered state.

"I-I don't…" Will gasped, legs suddenly giving out under him as the simmering fire within him suddenly erupted into an inferno. He would have fallen and drowned if Hannibal hadn't caught him. Will didn't even see him move, and the speed was unnerving, though at that moment he couldn't tell if he was thankful or terrified.

Carefully, almost gently, Hannibal lowered them down to the floor. Will was cradled in his arms, and he looked up blearily to see empty eyes covered by red poppies. There was death reflected in the flowers, the allure of eternal sleep. "What do they tell you, Will?"

The voice was a rattling hiss, like the sound of leaves in a forest and the coldness of night after a long summer day. It forced him to obey, and he opened his mouth to answer.

“They whisper truths I should know,” Will gasped, eyes rolling back in his head as his body convulsed, words pouring out of him. “Just outside of my grasp and hazy through the heat.”

“Good,” The Wendigo answered, a clawed hand on his throat, choking and choking until all he knew was darkness. Distantly, he thought he heard a hiss of triumph, of pride.

“*Clever boy.*”

xxxxxx

Fascinating.

His Will was so, so clever.

Hannibal smoothed a hand over those cherubic curls, a smile on his face as Will’s body continued to twitch, taken over by the seizure. He traced a hand over Will’s mouth and nose, feeling the frantic breaths and the shuddering pulse as Will’s body fought to live. He was beautiful in his suffering.

Hannibal lifted Will up with ease and settled him on the couch in the study. He sat on the arm chair across from it, hands folded and pressed against his mouth as he watched Will avidly. A short breath in, a harsh breath out. A jerky aftershock from the seizure taking over his limbs.

Hannibal could watch him forever.

Still, all good things must come to an end. Unfortunately, the encephalitis had taken hold of Will faster than he’d anticipated. He’d wanted to watch Will burn, his brilliant mind collapsing on itself through Hannibal’s steady influence. It would have been glorious, like the death of a star, out in a blaze of glory.

He was still tempted to kill him and feast on his body, but he’d seen the potential for more. Hidden deep in Will’s psyche was the thirst of a predator. He wanted to see how love and death would color a man like Will.

Will’s feelings had certainly been a surprise, even if they had been something Hannibal was well aware could develop. He hadn’t factored in how intoxicating Will could be. It was a temptation that Hannibal knew he should ignore, but he’d always been a man of indulgence.

He studied Will, the tremors finally slowing down until Will’s face was no longer contorted into an expression of agony. Instead, he looked deceptively calm and peaceful, as if he hadn’t just suffered an almost deadly seizure as his brain burned alive.

Hannibal moved closer, unable to resist the pull of such beauty. He traced fingers over the slope of Will’s nose, his thumb lingering on those chapped lips. There was a certain appeal to a content Will, and Hannibal saw it in the relaxed lines of Will’s face, his usual stress smoothed out.

He would have made a gorgeous third addition to his sounder of three.

That had been the original plan at least. With a sigh, Hannibal left the room to find his phone. It would be a pity for Will to die now. Hannibal wanted to see the look of betrayed realization on Will's face when he found out the true identity of the Ripper. Without the encephalitis clouding his mind, it wouldn't take long for Will to learn the truth. He wondered then, how his dear boy would react.

Would he reject the monster that reflected him? Or would he go down his own path of destruction guided by Hannibal's patient hands?

It was a curious question, and one he would have an answer to soon. Will had always been resplendent in his knowledge of others, his grasp on the core of someone and his ability to understand what he saw dazzling in its uniqueness. Will was the only one capable of understanding Hannibal down to his every atom, and to be accepted by him would be everything he ever dreamed of.

He made his calls, giving the ambulance his address before going back to Will. He stared down at the man for a long moment before pressing his palm against his forehead. The heat there was unbearable, the sweat coating his skin just a small indication of his body's losing fight against the fire in his mind.

Slowly, he carded his hand almost tenderly through Will's hair. Unable to resist the temptation, he tugged it back, exposing his throat. He leaned in, mouth parted slightly to breath in the scent of the woods, and the spicy tang of fear and pain on Will's skin. With a pleased hum, he pressed a kiss to Will's adam's apple, a thrill of pleasure racing through him as he restrained himself from opening his jaw wide and sinking his teeth into the throat of his prey. To claim what was his.

"Oh Will," Hannibal murmured, as he nosed at Will's jaw, a soft sigh falling out of him. "My dear, beautiful Will. How will your becoming change the taste of you?" A tear slid down Will's cheek, an unbidden reaction from his body because of the stress he'd endured, but it pleased Hannibal nonetheless. Carefully, as if drinking the most exquisite ambrosia, he caught the evidence of Will's suffering on the tip of his tongue.

Delicious.

End Notes

On the mild dubious consent: Will has a seizure from the encephalitis and while he's unconscious Hannibal does kind of sniff him a little and lick up one of his tears. That's about it. It wasn't planned but Hannibal is a #creep at times and the temptation was too great for him.

Though I live in a place of perpetual summer, it is not my favorite season and so I feel I may not have conveyed it properly here. But alas, I hope it was still somewhat enjoyable. I tried my best ;-;

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW THE SERIES PLEASE MAKE SURE TO SUBSCRIBE TO IT. You were all so very kind to me on the first part and I cherish the comments a lot! They really helped me finish this second part as quickly as I could. The last two parts will come in due time, but I hope to get them done within their respective seasons. Will is going to find out the truth in the next part wooooo! Any comments will help fuel my determination and keep me writing more <3 So please, if you enjoyed it do let me know. Comments are the lifeblood of writers and feedback is what keeps a fandom alive ^-^

If you'd like, please check out the art and fic masterpost on Tumblr as well as on Twitter. Please do give Lin some reblogs and retweets, they worked so hard on the art!

For those interested in more of my Hannigram writing, I am currently posting a multi-chapter fic that you can find here. It's a post-fall/post S3 fic where Will and Hannibal both end up in the afterlife and need to find their way to each other. Any support would be appreciated <3

You can find my tumblr here. Feel free to drop by and say hi! I'm also active on Twitter and it'll be 99% Hannigram/Hannibal stuff so please check me out there! I'd love to get to know some of you. I'll likely post little snippets of what I'm working on next as well.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!